

Integrating The Monorail

BALLARD

DEIS Comments

City of Seattle Comments on the
Seattle Monorail Green Line
Draft Environmental Impact
Statement

October 2003



City of Seattle

OVERVIEW

The City's DEIS comments related to the Ballard segment emphasize the need to refine the alignment alternatives to achieve the best possible balance of access, mobility and urban form in the 15th Avenue NW corridor, the need to identify specific measures to mitigate impacts to parking supply and demand, and the need to more definitively describe project scope and design features that will make the Green Line consistent with neighborhood visions and plans.

ACCESS & MOBILITY

Because of sight distance requirements, the center-of-roadway alignment alternative will likely require restrictions to left-turns into and out of driveways and result in limited storage lengths for left-turn lanes at intersections. These appear to be unavoidable adverse impacts. The west alignment shows greater potential to be integrated into a roadway design that maintains the essential access and mobility functions of the roadway, but these design solutions may impact on-street parking. Additionally, even optimized side-of-street alignments may impact transit operations, freight mobility, and/or critical turning movements in some areas along the Green Line corridor, and specific mitigation measures must be identified in such instances.

Freight Mobility

The discussion of existing travel lane widths and turning radii required for truck movement states that these "could be maintained" (4-89). As a designated truck route, these must be maintained unless SMP has a different proposal.

The FEIS should give recognition that there is heavy truck demand and travel desires in the Ballard/Interbay area, in addition to the Duwamish area. They are both noted industrial areas, serving the maritime industry (4-8).

Level of Service and Congestion

Intersection operation must reflect current and planned lane configurations. At 15th NW and NW 85th Street, the northbound curb lane functions as a right turn lane since the far-side lane drops within a short distance (4-33). The intersection level of service (LOS) is expected to degrade for both the No-Build PM peak as well as with the project - and mitigation may be required for this intersection. Likewise, the northbound curb lane on 15th NW at NW Market Street functions as a right turn lane (with far-side taper to two lanes within 1-2 blocks) and should be modeled as such.

Morning peak hour traffic on 15th Ave NW currently backs up through the Holman Road/15th NW /Mary intersection, causing delays to existing side-street traffic (4-33). This is expected to continue into the future. Possible mitigation for degraded intersection operation on 15th Avenue NW at NE 85th Street may include reconstruction of the intersection including widening of the side street, to accommodate a change in signal phasing from split phase (east-west). Mitigation of degraded operation at 15th NW and NW Market Street may include realignment of the guide-way to retain the current lane configuration.

Traffic Operations

The center columns on 15th Avenue NW will disrupt current left turn capability, as noted. The FEIS should identify the extent and severity of truck trip diversion, which is undocumented (4-44). What restrictions will be imposed? Some potential impacts of truck diversions are: increased travel time, increased cost of transporting services and goods.

The discussion of mitigation of the 15th Avenue NW/NW Market Street intersection notes that "providing an additional northbound through lane at NW Market Street and tapering down to two lanes north of NW Market Street would provide

additional capacity at this intersection" (4-90). Such a lane already exists for northbound traffic, with a taper between NW 56th Street and NW 57th Street. Is an additional taper lane proposed, or is it recommended that the existing taper lane be extended further north?

The DEIS states that "construction of alignment Alternative 1.2...would likely be more disruptive" (4-492). Please be more specific about the nature and extent of impacts that would make this more disruptive. With respect to the following statement, "Disrupted access to some businesses could occur" - does this apply equally to all alternatives?

Transit Operations

The FEIS should identify the impacts of monorail facilities located in the roadway on the design and operation of the arterial system (such as signalization or channelization) and the resultant impacts on transit operations (speed and reliability). The FEIS should identify measures such as: off-street bus transfer facilities incorporated into station sites; in-lane bus stops; bus queue-jump facilities; exclusive transit lanes; and/or transit signal priority to avoid or minimize adverse impacts to transit speed.

Transit, Bicycle & Pedestrian Connections

The FEIS must include more definitive drawings and descriptions of the project facilities that will result in good intermodal connections such as effective bus transfers at Crown Hill and improvements to pedestrian access to those stations that may present access challenges. At minimum, space to accommodate future improvements necessary to attract and accommodate ridership should be provided at station areas.

The DEIS states that the "Project could benefit from sidewalk improvements" along NW 85th Street and "improved bicycle facilities" along 15th Avenue W. Is SMP proposing these improvements as

mitigation? The mitigation section should not be a wish list of future City improvements, but a list of improvements required to mitigate project impacts (4-91).

Impacts to Parking Demand

The City believes that hide-and-ride parking impacts are inevitable within one-quarter mile of the Ballard segment stations unless parking management programs and measures are implemented. The Project Description should include a commitment to parking management programs and measures. The specific programs and measures can be identified later in the project design and approval process, with assistance from the City and input from neighborhood stakeholders. The Project Description should commit to implementation of parking management strategies before stations open, to avoid rather than react to hide-and-ride parking impacts.

Impacts to Parking Supply

Impacts to the parking supply should be mitigated through measures such as:

- creating new on-street parking nearby by converting unrestricted parking to short-term parking (through use of paid parking technology, time-limit signs, and load zones).
- identifying opportunities for shared off-street parking
- creating new off-street parking supply as part of a joint development or single-purpose parking facility.
- supporting development of a transportation management association or marketing programs that extend parking/transportation demand management tools to local businesses in the station area, to reduce auto travel demand to the area.

NEIGHBORHOODS & BUSINESSES

The FEIS should draw on the SMP's architecture and urban design programs to assess in greater detail the relationship of the Green Line to the Crown Hill/Ballard Neighborhood Plan and 15th Avenue NW Visioning Project, and should more definitively identify project scope and design features that will make the Green Line support of neighborhood visions and plans.

Business Access & Parking

The DEIS states that impacts of the partial acquisition and displacement of a portion of a drugstore/pharmacy parking could be mitigated (4-158). Specific mitigation strategies should be identified to address the partial acquisition and displacement of pharmacy parking.

The DEIS states that "with Alternatives 1.1.1 and 1.1.2, the analysis assumes that 45 new all-day parking spaces could also be provided between columns on the west side of 15th Avenue NW south of NW Market Street" (4-42). With respect to this segment of the alignment, where would the guideway leave the 15th Avenue NW right-of-way in the process of transitioning to the new bridge structure? Would the new parking spaces on 15th Avenue NW interfere with the southbound exit ramp from 15th Avenue NW to Leary Way?

The Land Use section states that Alternative 1.1 (west) "could reduce parking availability if parking remains unrestricted" (4-140). Is this a proposal to restrict parking as mitigation? If so, the proposal should also appear in the mitigation section (or Project Description). Also, the Transportation section states that this alternative "would," not "could," eliminate parking spaces. Identification of impacts and mitigation should be consistent across sections of the DEIS.

Land Use & Development

In several places in the Ballard segment, residential uses are identified as being

"within a block or two" (4-122). However, as figure 4.3.1 shows, residential uses are only 1/2 block away, immediately behind businesses. A more explicit description of the abrupt transition (or lack of transition) between the commercial uses along 15th AV NW and the single family uses would more clearly present the existing conditions.

The west side alternatives for the Ballard High and Crown Hill stations are immediately adjacent to low-density residential zones. This is not reflected in the statement, "given the predominantly commercial uses and limited residential uses immediately adjacent to the stations, the larger scale of the station buildings is not expected to substantially impair the existing use or future development of nearby properties" (4-140). The FEIS should discuss how residential properties immediately west of the proposed stations may be impacted by the development of station structures 60 to 65 feet in height. For example, the FEIS should better explain how "context-sensitive design" will minimize the effect of the Crown Hill (West) station on the neighborhood, given the significant difference in the height of the station (4-141).

In describing Alternative 1.1 (West Side of 15th), the DEIS states that the guideway or columns "could also reduce visibility to businesses but this is not expected to impair the use of the properties" (4-141). The FEIS should expand this discussion to show why the use of a property for business purposes would not be impaired by reduced visibility.

In appendix U-2, the statement is made that "preservation of mobility for freight and employees" is a key issue for the BINMIC plan. The FEIS should provide analysis as to how the project is consistent with this goal, if the FEIS will describe the Green Line as consistent with land use plans in this area. Revised alignment alternatives and specific mitigation measures will likely be necessary to support the claim of consistency.